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ABSTRACT

The teaching and technology associated with the distance delivery of education are relatively new and rapidly changing. Effective teaching and learning methods are still being developed. The following suggestions are based primarily on patterns and experiences in instructional telecommunication within the University of Alaska System: (1) students need encouragement to participate actively and to stay focused on the course content; (2) teachers need to recognize the change in their role from instructor to facilitator, to adapt instruction as necessary, and to develop skills to facilitate students' learning; (3) course content may remain the same as is presented in traditional classrooms, but careful planning is required to organize the course so it can be delivered at a distance; (4) teaching methods must be flexible enough to accommodate the curriculum, the students, and the technology; and (5) students are often better able to achieve their educational goals when they participate in the process through giving feedback on course strengths and weaknesses. Attention should also be paid to the technological aspects of distance education to ensure the proper use of the equipment. This brief guide outlines the roles of the student, the instructor, and the facilitator; provides guidelines for planning and organizing the course; presents suggestions for successful teaching strategies; and provides guidelines for obtaining feedback. Technical tips are also included. (DB)

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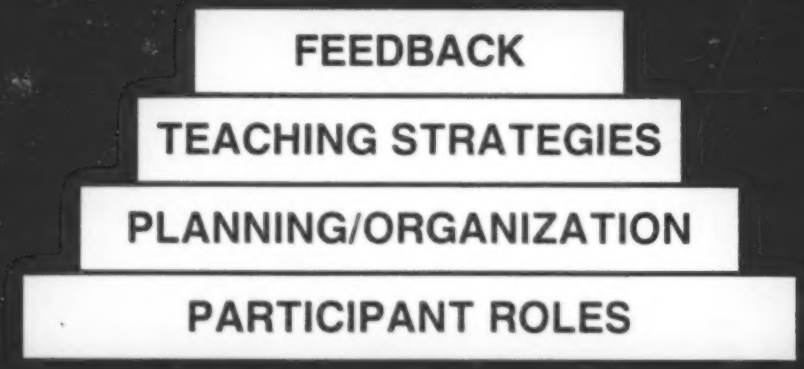

DISTANCE EDUCATION TEACHING TIPS AT A GLANCE

STATEWIDE DISTANCE EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA SYSTEM

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INTRODUCTION

The teaching and technology associated with the distance delivery of instruction are relatively new and rapidly changing. Effective teaching and learning techniques are still being developed, and trends are still being established. The following suggestions are based primarily on patterns and experiences in instructional telecommunication within the University of Alaska System.

PARTICIPANT ROLES

Although technology plays an important part in making distance delivered courses successful, it is not the most critical factor. The success of any instructional experience is ultimately determined by the roles students, instructors, and facilitators play in the teaching-learning process.

☐ ***The Student.*** In addition to the roles and responsibilities performed by students in traditional settings, distance delivery systems have their own demands. Students need competence in using the technological delivery system and persistence in remaining focused on course content, not the technology that transmits it. They may also need to take a more aggressive role in providing interaction and feedback. Students need to feel comfortable participating . . . at a distance.

☐ ***The Instructor.*** In a distance delivered course, the instructor faces the challenge of becoming personally familiar with the technological system in use, while making students comfortable with it as well. Consider these strategies:

- **Adapt instruction to meet the varied needs of the students, the content, and the limitations of the delivery system.**
- **Hold a pre-course audio conference to increase student familiarity and comfort with the system.**
- **Familiarize students with each other and with the instructor: develop/distribute student and instructor biographical sketches, make on-the-air introductions, have students state their names and locations when they address the group.**
- **Visit the different sites during the course, meeting individually with students.**
- **Maintain phone-in office hours so students can call in collect.**
- **Develop skills to facilitate students' learning on their own and in concert with other students at a distance.**
- **The teacher and students should work together to minimize and rectify technological problems.**

☐ ***The Facilitator:*** In many distance delivered courses, the instructor finds it useful to appoint a site facilitator to assist students in the use of course materials and keep them directed toward their instructional goals. The facilitator acts as a "bridge" between students and instructors—keeping instructors apprised of student interests and progress, as well as providing guidance and answering questions for students.

PLANNING / ORGANIZATION

In developing/adapting distance delivered instruction, the core content remains basically the same, although presenting it often takes more preparation and forethought than traditional instruction. Consider the following:

- ☐ Determine the need for instruction; work with unit personnel and site coordinators on course approval, scheduling, enrollment, and administration.
- ☐ Keep course planning flexible to accommodate local demands on students (e.g., subsistence, cultural events, etc.)
- ☐ Before developing something "new," check/review existing materials.
- ☐ Follow a printed or verbal outline, periodically referring to your place in the overall organizational scheme.
- ☐ Incorporate a variety of media into your course, but only after evaluating their appropriateness. For example:
  - **Analyze strengths/weaknesses of the various media.**
  - **Refrain from incorporating media just because they are available for use.**
  - **Recognize that student learning is more dependent on the content being taught than the medium used to present it.**
- ☐ Ensure that each site is properly equipped with functional and accessible equipment.
- ☐ Have facilitators become familiar with course materials, methods, and associated equipment before the course begins.
- ☐ Set rules, guidelines, and standards for classes and uphold them.
- ☐ Schedule phone-in office hours and have your department pay the toll charges.
- ☐ Use a checksheet to track participating sites/students and the content being covered.
- ☐ Be sensitive to student needs to meet standard University deadlines despite the lag time often involved in rural mail delivery.
- ☐ Have all materials on-site before your course begins.

TEACHING STRATEGIES

Teaching a distance delivered course presents many of the same challenges and concerns as traditional teaching, as well as some that may be new and unique to this teaching method. Consider the following:

- ☐ Make content relevant. Analyze student needs, abilities, goals, and objectives.
- ☐ Present overall course goals and objectives. Let students know what you expect of them by beginning each class with a statement of purpose for that class.
- ☐ Formulate a series of study/discussion questions to help students focus on major themes.
- ☐ Be aware of student needs for reinforcement, review, repetition, and remediation.
- ☐ Realistically assess how much content can be covered in each session — don't overwhelm the audience.
- ☐ Diversify and pace course activities; avoid long lectures.
- ☐ Be aware that members of the audience may have different learning styles. Some will learn more easily during group interaction; others will learn most while working independently.
- ☐ Be sensitive to different communication styles. For example:
  - **Be familiar with local values and avoid tactless remarks or mistakes that might offend students.**
  - **Be aware that students may have different language skills.**
  - **Don't use jargon.**
  - **Use humor with discretion — usually it is culture specific and won't translate equally to all students.**
- ☐ Humanize your program — focus on the students, not the media/materials.
- ☐ Provide a strong print component to supplement non-print materials.
- ☐ Use local case studies and examples whenever possible.
- ☐ Personalize your involvement as much as possible. For example:
  - **Visit and teach from each site or meet individually with students from each site.**
  - **Ask personalized questions (e.g., "How's the weather in Ambler tonight?"), but don't overdo it.**
- ☐ Be concise; use short, cohesive statements and ask direct questions.
- ☐ Vary the pace — slower for new material, faster for review.
- ☐ Help students visualize what you discuss.
- ☐ Be yourself and relax — it makes students more comfortable.

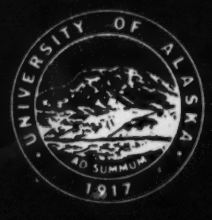
FEEDBACK

Students are often better able to achieve their educational goals when there is group participation in the process. Feedback can be used as an indicator of this achievement. Consider the following:

- ☐ Have the facilitator provide guidance when students seem hesitant to ask questions or participate.
- ☐ Stress your interest in receiving feedback on course strengths/weaknesses.
- ☐ Improve your chances of getting feedback by using a combination of methods. For example:
  - **Provide students/facilitators with evaluation questionnaires, both during and after the course.**
  - **Have facilitators submit class progress reports.**
  - **Discuss the course with groups and individuals, on-site if possible.**
- ☐ Arrange for students at each site to work together on activities such as group presentations and role playing.
- ☐ Be aware of cultural differences in social interaction.
- ☐ Encourage students to query points they don't understand — they are probably not alone in their confusion.
- ☐ Politely but firmly discourage audience members/sites from monopolizing class time.

TECHNICAL TIPS

- Make sure the audio conferencing bridge can accommodate your needs before registering students.
- Make sure that on-site audio conferencing and/or telephone equipment is available and accessible during class time.
- Make sure instructors/students/facilitators know how to operate audio conferencing equipment and feel comfortable using it.
- Begin each class with a roll call to ensure that the technical equipment is operating properly.
- Develop a back-up plan in case the technical delivery system fails.
- Maintain a log of difficulties at each site to help eliminate problems.
- Label all technical equipment clearly to avoid confusion — provide instructions for use.
- Assure equipment compatibility before the course begins. For example, if the videotape is 1/2 inch, make sure a 1/2 inch tape player is available.
- Provide a troubleshooter's guide for the equipment you rely on.
- Establish a toll-free "hotline" number to call if technical problems arise.



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